

CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING IN THE UNITED STATES MARINE  
CORPS: A PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS IN THE LONG WAR

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

### CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING IN THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS: A PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS IN THE LONG WAR

by Major Edward J. Healey Jr., 85 pages.

The U.S. Marine Corps faces great challenges as it participates in the Long War. To enhance its chances of success in this war, the Marine Corps must institutionalize the importance of cultural awareness in military operations by adopting a comprehensive training program. This training will ensure that Marines deploying in support of the Long War possess the appropriate level of cultural competency to be successful in the field. Marines will need both cultural awareness and language training to achieve this competency and the training requirements will differ based on a Marine's duty assignment and military specialty.

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## ACRONYMS

BOC	Basic Officer Course
BTT	Border Transition Team
CALL	Center for Army Lessons Learned
CAOCL	Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning
CAP	Combined Action Program
CSC	Command and Staff College
DLI	Defense Language Institute
DOD	Department of Defense
EWS	Expeditionary Warfare School
FAO	Foreign Area Officer
GWOT	Global War on Terror
HA/DR	Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief
HET	Human Exploitation Team
HQMC	Headquarters Marine Corps
ITB	Infantry Training Battalion
JLU	Joint Language University
MAGTF	Marine Air Ground Task Force
MCCLL	Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned
MCDP	Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication
MCT	Marine Combat Training
MCTAG	Marine Corps Training and Advisor Group
MCRP	Marine Corps Reference Publication
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force



MITT	Military Transition Team
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
PME	Professional Military Education
RAO	Regional Area Officer
SC MAGTF	Security Cooperation Marine Air Ground Task Force
SNCO	Staff Non-Commissioned Officer
SOI	School of Infantry
SPTT	Special Police Transition Team
TBS	The Basic School
TECOM	Training and Education Command
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Until as recently as a couple of years ago, the manner in which the U.S. Marine Corps trained to conduct military operations overseas has been severely deficient in one aspect. Despite more than two-hundred years of conducting military operations abroad ranging from full-scale war to occupation duty, the Marine Corps continued to neglect the significance of cultural awareness in military operations during training. While progress has been made in recent years, the Marine Corps still has not established an effective plan to address the cultural awareness training requirements of the Long War. This paper will demonstrate that the Marine Corps must institutionalize the importance of cultural awareness in military operations by adopting a comprehensive training program. This training will ensure that Marines deploying in support of the Long War possess the appropriate level of cultural competency to be successful in the field. Marines will need both cultural awareness and language training to achieve this competency and the training requirements will differ based on a Marine's duty assignment and military specialty.

The United States is one of the most culturally diverse nations on the planet. Often referred to as a "melting pot," the United States has welcomed people from many different countries, races, and religions, all hoping to find freedom, new opportunities, and a better way of life (Millet, 2000). Despite its multicultural diversity, many Americans ironically do not place much emphasis on understanding foreign cultures. Cultural awareness is not a quality highly sought after by the average American. Americans demonstrate little understanding of foreign cultures when traveling outside the United States. What should be surprising is that members of the U.S. Marine Corps, who

spend the vast majority of their time either training to or conducting military operations in foreign lands, have repeatedly demonstrated the same lack of cultural awareness as their civilian counterparts.

Cultural awareness has become a popular buzzword within the U.S. military establishment in recent years. In order to understand the significance of cultural awareness, it is important to first grasp the meaning of culture. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5 (Counterinsurgency) defines culture as the “web of meaning” shared by members of a particular society or group within a society (Amos, 2006, 3-6). Defined another way, culture is the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another (Websters, 1991, 330). Cultural awareness has taken on such importance among Marines because the nature of operations they are currently conducting, and expect to conduct for the foreseeable future, places them in close proximity with civilian populations whose support is required.

In 2001, the United States entered into a global struggle different from any it has previously experienced. The attacks of September 11, 2001 set the United States in motion towards the Global War on Terror (GWOT). This war is directed not against another nation or an alliance of nations, but against a global insurgency driven by religious ideology. The GWOT targets both state and non-state actors that perpetrate terrorist acts and those who give them aid and comfort. The GWOT is a global struggle with multiple fronts, most notably in Afghanistan, Iraq, Southeast Asia, and the Horn of Africa. After nearly six years, the term Long War replaced GWOT as the official name

of this war, reflecting the nature of the current conflict and emphasizing that it will continue for years.

The U.S. Marine Corps has been an active participant in the Long War since it began in late 2001. Two Marine Expeditionary Units participated in the early stages of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. The First Marine Expeditionary Force (Reinforced) was a key component of the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 and continues to participate in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) along with the Second Marine Expeditionary Force. Marines have conducted stability operations throughout the Horn of Africa region in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). They conducted counterinsurgency operations in the southern Philippines in recent years as well. Confirming the Marine Corps' long-term involvement in the Long War, General James Conway, Commandant of the Marine Corps, stated the Marine Corps' main focus for the next few years will be to "achieve victory in the Long War" (Conway, 2006, 1).

Recent combat operations are indicative of only a portion of the Marine Corps' future role in the Long War. A recent Marine Corps study indicates that Marines will execute the full spectrum of military operations, from high-intensity combat to low-intensity operations:

The Marine Corps Intelligence Activity noted in its recent midrange estimate that Marines will be expected to perform missions at and beyond the littoral regions, to include stability and support operations, counterinsurgency operations, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and nation building, peace operations, combating terrorism, counter-proliferation and nonproliferation, combating drug trafficking and crime, and noncombatant evacuation operations (Thompson, 2006, 48).

Irregular warfare and asymmetrical enemies will characterize the preponderance of

combat operations (Hilburn, 2006, 31). In addition to combat operations, former Commandant Michael Hagee foresees that Marines will be heavily engaged in humanitarian crises around the world similar to the 2004 Tsunami and 2006 Java earthquake relief efforts (Hilburn, 2006, 30). Colonel Dennis Thompson, retired Marine and current Potomac Institute Research Fellow with the Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities, predicts that Marines will spend considerable time in Africa training indigenous military forces and conducting civil-military operations (Thompson, 2006, 48). Marines will also be increasingly involved in security cooperation operations and exercises with allied and partner nations (Hilburn, 2006, 31).

Consistent with these predictions, the Marine Corps has recently unveiled a new vision for the employment of its operating forces in the Long War that further highlights the importance of culturally competent Marines. The Security Cooperation (SC) Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) concept directs the deployment of battalion-sized task forces to the U.S. Southern Command, U.S. Africa Command, and U.S. European Command areas of responsibility to participate in the combatant commanders' security cooperation programs (Abbott, 2008, 8). These SC MAGTFs will be working to build partner nation capacity through military to military training exercises while also conducting humanitarian assistance missions as required. Such missions will require the Marines of the SC MAGTF to work closely with soldiers and civilians from diverse foreign cultures. These missions require a high level of cultural competency from the participating Marines to enhance the probability of success.

Whatever the future mission, it is reasonable to assume that Marines supporting the Long War will deploy overseas and operate in close proximity with culturally diverse

populations. General Conway stated in his 2006 Commandant's Planning Guidance that the Long War will require Marine combat power provided by "boots on the ground" in foreign lands. These Marines will need to understand the significance of cultural awareness and its effect on their ability to accomplish their mission. Success in the Long War is less dependent on killing all enemy combatants as it is on changing the conditions that motivate the next generation of terrorists. At the tactical level, cultural awareness aids Marines as they conduct operations among civilian populations in foreign lands. General James Mattis, former Commanding General of the First Marine Expeditionary Force and currently the Commanding General of the U.S. Joint Forces Command, stated that "culturally aware Marines are more comfortable and capable of operating in complex situations where firepower may not be the primary means to victory, or may even be counterproductive" (Hilburn, 2005, 1). A lack of cultural awareness and understanding can unintentionally alienate people, either civilians or military partners, and make tactical operations that much more difficult due to the resulting lack of cooperation or outright hostility.

Although the significance of cultural awareness is not a new concept in the military, the Marine Corps did not have a formal program providing cultural awareness training to its operating forces until recently. Marines participating in OEF and OIF in 2001 through 2003 did not receive formal cultural awareness instruction sponsored by the U.S. Marine Corps Training and Education Command (TECOM). Most units deploying to Afghanistan or Iraq prior to 2004 conducted their own cultural awareness training. This training had varying degrees of quality and lacked institutional oversight by TECOM. Typically the training consisted of brief lectures to large groups of Marines

covering cultural taboos in Iraq or Afghanistan (a checklist of things not to do), a few key phrases in Arabic, and an overly-simplified historical overview of Iraq or Afghanistan. In late 2003, TECOM began providing limited formal cultural awareness training to its operating forces preparing to return to Iraq in early 2004. TECOM also began providing similar training to units deploying to Afghanistan. The depth and quality of TECOM's cultural awareness training program has continued to evolve over the past few years in an effort to meet the needs of the Marine Corps' operating forces engaged in the Long War.

Given the importance of cultural awareness in future Marine Corps operations, this thesis will explore this subject in detail in order to answer the primary research question. Specifically, what are the key components of a cultural awareness training program the Marine Corps must adopt to properly prepare its operating forces to support the Long War? The research associated with the answer to this question will examine several topics. These topics include current cultural awareness training programs of the Marine Corps and other armed services, the Marine Corps' role in the Long War, and historical examples of military units that demonstrated cultural awareness while conducting operations in a foreign land. After presenting a review of the current literature available on these topics in the next chapter, the methodology and key terms will follow. Chapters four and five will establish what it is required to be culturally competent and review what the Marine Corps is currently doing to achieve cultural competency within its operating forces. Chapter six will examine reasons why the Marine Corps has fallen short in the past to institutionalize the importance of cultural awareness. Chapter seven will outline recommendations for the Marine Corps cultural awareness training program.



In the end, it will be clear that the Marine Corps must institutionalize the importance of cultural awareness in military operations and, to ensure Marines deploying in support of the Long War possess the appropriate level of cultural awareness to be successful in the field, it must adopt a comprehensive training program. The training program should provide various degrees of cultural awareness training to Marines based on their rank, billet assignment, and operational responsibilities. The core training should consist of language training and developing a useful understanding of the local culture of the operational area. The scope of the program should extend beyond the Long War's current theaters of operation in Iraq and Afghanistan. It should also include a plan to sustain this training once deployed.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Having asserted in the last chapter that cultural awareness is significant in military operations and that the Marine Corps must institutionalize this importance while adopting a comprehensive cultural awareness training program, it is necessary to explore the collection of literature related to these subjects. Much has been written in recent years about the relationship between military operations and cultural awareness as a result of the U.S. military's experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq. The four major themes that emerge from the collection of writings are: 1) cultural awareness matters in military operations, 2) effective cultural awareness training does more than provide the standard do's and don'ts of foreign cultures, 3) the U.S. military did not properly train its troops in cultural awareness prior to OEF and OIF, and 4) the U.S. military leadership now recognizes this deficiency and has implemented policies and programs to rectify the problem. The literature review will be sequenced according to these four themes, each theme reinforcing the two central points of the thesis.

#### Culture Awareness Matters

The importance of cultural awareness in military operations emerged as the most consistent theme throughout the literature review. Specifically, cultural awareness among military forces can either aid or inhibit effective operations. During the past five years, there have been a number of individual interviews and unit surveys of U.S. service members returning from overseas deployments in support of OEF and OIF. These surveys and interviews reveal that service members believe cultural awareness is critical

to their ability to operate in close proximity with foreign populations. The report on the Marine Corps Non-Commissioned Officers' Lessons Learned Conference in 2005 stated that "language and cultural awareness were viewed as crucial to success" (MCCLL, 2005, 13). The after action report for the U.S. Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Combat Team of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division deployment to Afghanistan stated that cultural awareness training was critical for deploying personnel to fully understand the operational environment and effects in theater (MCCLL, 2007, 1).

The need for cultural awareness among military forces is not restricted to those participating in combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Marines have participated in numerous non-combat operations in recent years and are sure to continue this trend in the future. Cultural awareness, or lack thereof, can affect these missions in similar ways as it does combat operations (Hilburn, 2006, 30). A recent study by the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab found that a sound understanding of the culture and perspective of the Host Nation (HN) is critical for military forces engaged in international humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) operations (MCWL, 2006, 5). After action reports from Marine Corps training exercises with African coalition partners highlight the significance of cultural awareness in peace-time activities as well (McRostie, 2007, 2).

More important than the admission that cultural awareness *does* matter in military operations is *why* it matters. Much is written about the nature of the Long War and its affect on how military forces will conduct operations during the course of the war. Assuming that future military operations will be a combination of high intensity combat and low intensity conflict interspersed with humanitarian assistance and various foreign military engagement activities in foreign lands, military forces will have much interface

with indigenous populations (McFarland, 2005, 62). In the late 1990s, former Commandant of the Marine Corps General Charles Krulak advanced his vision of future military operations in the context of a three-block war: over the course of traveling three city blocks, a Marine could in a short span of time find himself moving from a humanitarian assistance scenario of handing out food on one block to a low-intensity conflict task of conducting an urban patrol on the second block and becoming engaged in a high-intensity firefight in the vicinity of the third block (Krulak, 1999, 1). The ability to positively influence the native population's perception of the United States can directly affect mission accomplishment in this operating environment, an ability which begins with cultural awareness (Milligan, 2006, 18). Demonstrating cultural awareness and understanding during such operations can help U.S. service members avoid creating new enemies among a neutral population (Harder, 2006, 1A). It can also help military forces elicit the support of the population or at least diminish their support and aid to the enemy (Freakley, 2005, 2).

While cultural awareness can help avoid creating new enemies, it also contributes to gaining a sound understanding of how to defeat an enemy. U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel William Wunderle highlights this point in his study of cultural awareness in the U.S. armed forces:

Understanding an adversary requires more than intelligence from three-letter agencies and satellite photos; it requires an understanding of their interests, habits, intentions, beliefs, social organizations, and political symbols – in other words, their culture. An American soldier can liken culture to a minefield: dangerous ground that, if not breached, must be navigated with caution, understanding, and respect (Wunderle, 2006, 3).

Without an understanding of the enemy's culture, it is difficult to determine his strengths

and weaknesses or anticipate his actions. However, military planning based on an understanding of the enemy's culture and its impact on friendly and enemy courses of action is much more likely to result in successful military operations (Karcanes, 2007, 5). Cultural awareness can aid in identifying the enemy's center of gravity – a military term defined as those characteristics, capabilities, or sources of power from which a military force derives its strength or will to fight (MCRP 5-12A, 2004, I-28) – and subsequently the identification of enemy vulnerabilities.

Cultural awareness is just as important in U.S. military relations with allies and coalition partners as with its enemies. Future operations in the Long War will more often than not be coalition operations requiring the U.S. military to work alongside military forces of other nations. Understanding the cultural nuances of friendly military forces can help identify the strengths and weaknesses of those military forces and how best to employ those forces during a particular operation (Arcuri, 2007, 14). Sufficient cultural awareness will be pivotal in the Marine Corps' ability to satisfactorily perform its increased number of foreign military training missions in Africa and throughout the globe (Thompson, 2006, 48). Such cultural awareness enabled successful Marine Corps training missions in the Republic of Georgia and must be applied on all such missions (Roberts, 2005, 1).

#### What Cultural Awareness Is and What It Is Not

Cultural awareness and its application in military operations are more complex than simply understanding what is considered taboo in foreign lands. Wide-spread misunderstanding of the meaning of cultural awareness has certainly contributed to the Marine Corps failure to embrace its importance and develop a suitable training program.

All too often, U.S. military forces have been deployed to foreign lands without language training and only a cursory understanding of the standard do's and don'ts among the local populace (Peters, 2007, 13). This level of cultural awareness training may be enough to keep a Marine or soldier out of jail in a foreign land, but it does little to increase the likelihood of accomplishing the military mission. Cultural awareness extends beyond knowing what is offensive to foreign populations and focuses on important aspects of foreign cultures, several of which are explored in succeeding paragraphs.

Most approaches to obtaining cultural awareness are rooted in local history. Learning the historical precedent for the current cultural climate in a specific region or country is critical to gaining an understanding of the people of that region (Lively, 2007, 23). Recognizing its importance, the Dutch military instructs its forces on the cultural heritage and history of the mission area prior to deployment (Gooren, 2006, 55). A basic understanding of the history of a region or population can help U.S. service members put what they see there in context and possibly lead to more effective decisions about what military actions are appropriate in a given situation. Understanding the local history and heritage may also assist in understanding the effect of the U.S. military presence on the local population (Krauss, 1999, 16).

Closely tied to the history of a particular region and a critical component of cultural awareness is knowledge of the local social relationships and hierarchies. This knowledge includes a basic understanding of the major cultural differences between tribes, groups, factions and organizations (Arcuri, 2007, 12). The significance of tribal associations and tribal leaders is very foreign to most Americans, yet it is an essential element of many cultures around the world. Military forces must be aware of the social

hierarchy in the areas where they operate (Lively, 2007, 23). Such knowledge can enable U.S. forces to identify who exerts power among the population and determine whether these leaders need to be befriended or targeted. Furthermore, understanding rivalries among different ethnic groups can help military forces identify tension points and possibly resolve them before they escalate to conflict.

Religious beliefs and ideologies are the central component of many foreign societies (Karcane, 2007, 9). Understanding these religious beliefs and ideologies is perhaps the most important piece of cultural awareness for U.S. military forces. Because religion has varying effects on the values and attitudes of the population, gaining an understanding of religion's role in local society is crucial to understanding and effectively working with and among the local populace (Freakley, 2005, 2). Military forces must also consider the religious impact on political and social institutions (Lively, 2007, 23). The French army's experiences in Africa proved that a basic understanding of religious beliefs and superstitions are paramount to successful operations there (Boré, 2006, 110). The ongoing deadly clashes between Sunni and Shiite Muslims in Iraq illustrate the significance of religious beliefs among that population and their affect on U.S. military operations.

The quality of interpersonal relations between the local populace and U.S. military members is possibly the most measurable result of the level of cultural awareness attained by the service members. A U.S. service member applies cultural awareness, either effectively or ineffectively, every time he interacts with a member of the local populace. Therefore, a critical component of cultural awareness must be an understanding of the local norms of interpersonal relations (Lively, 2007, 23). It is

necessary for military personnel to know the sources of pride and shame among the locals to avoid inadvertently offending them and to show respect for their cultural values (Arcuri, 2007, 13). Little nuances like removing one's sunglasses when talking with an Iraqi man so he can gain eye contact are important aspects of cultural awareness (Hilburn, 2006, 33). Dutch military cultural awareness training includes how to avoid offensive body language, facial expressions, and gestures (Gooren, 2006, 58).

Language skills are the final component of cultural awareness emphasized throughout many of the writings on the subject. Cultural awareness training without language training is ineffective (Karcanes, 2007, 13). The predominant school of thought seems to be that the ability to communicate in the native language of the area where U.S. military forces deploy demonstrates respect and is appreciated by the local populace. "If you know a few words, it shows the people that you want to be close to them," said Hamid al Tamimi, an Arab Christian who fled Iraq in 1999 and now helps train U.S. Army units at the National Training Center before they deploy to Iraq (Harder, 2006, 1A). Marine Corps Captain James Lively identified language training as a key component of his recommended Cultural Education Program (Lively, 2007, 24). Retired Marine Corps Colonel Jeff Bearor, director of the Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL), advocates teaching Marines enough of a language to do the things they need to, which includes effectively interacting with the local populace (Kennedy, 2006, 47). None of the literature reviewed revealed the belief that language skills were not an important part of the cultural awareness training U.S. military forces need to be successful in the Long War.



### A Failure to Prepare

Despite a long history of operating in foreign lands among indigenous populations, the U.S. military, and the Marine Corps in particular, have not effectively trained its forces in the area of cultural awareness. This failure is consistent with the fact that the Marine Corps has not institutionalized the important relationship between cultural awareness and military operations. The trend of not conducting cultural awareness training continued until more than two-years into OEF and months after the beginning of OIF. The Marine Corps did not begin a systematic study of foreign cultures in an operationally focused fashion until 2004 (Salmoni, 2006, 79). David Segal, Director of the Center for Research on Military Organization, observed, “Three years into this war, they’re figuring out how to fight it,” specifically referring to cultural awareness training in the U.S. military (Sappenfield, 2006, 1).

Not only has the U.S. military been tardy in providing cultural awareness training to forces participating in OEF and OIF, the quality of the initial training was sometimes unsatisfactory. Attendees at a Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned-sponsored Foreign Military Advisor Conference in 2006 generally agreed that the majority of the cultural awareness training they received prior to deployment was rudimentary and of little value. It was either too simplistic and basic or “flat out” wrong (MCCLL, 2006, 16). This lack of proper training had a direct impact on the effectiveness of the military advisors working in Iraq and Afghanistan:

If we listened to our military transition teams (MiTTs), border transition teams (BTTs), and special police transition teams (SPTTs) returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, we clearly would hear the message that cultural awareness training is important. They say that cultural training would have better informed them and facilitated their mission – but training was either nonexistent or deficient before they deployed (Bonvillain, 2007, 22).

The Defense Department recently rated itself in a self-assessment as “inadequate” in its culture and language preparation to conduct the full spectrum of military operations (Wunderle, 2006, 4).

The ramifications of insufficient cultural awareness training for U.S. military forces have been significant. The lack of cultural awareness training prior to OIF led to a lack of understanding of the Iraqi people by U.S. forces which resulted in offending the locals and often creating more enemies (Hilburn, 2005, 30). Many Iraqis perceive the U.S. military practice in Iraq of destroying the homes of suspected insurgents as mimicking Israeli tactics in the Gaza Strip and further inflames tensions between the American forces and Iraqis (Wunderle, 2006, 2). The common practice by U.S. troops of forcing the heads of arrested Iraqis to the ground is offensive to the detainees as well as Muslim bystanders as this position is forbidden except when praying (Wunderle, 2006, 2). These and countless other examples of insufficient cultural awareness have created adversity and friction at the tactical level for U.S. troops operating in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The demonstrated lack of cultural awareness by U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan has not gone unnoticed. Lessons learned studies from OEF and OIF consistently point to a lack of cultural awareness as a major impediment to mission success (Connable, 2005, 2). U.S. Representative Ike Skelton (D-MO) asserted that a thorough lack of understanding of the Iraqi culture has contributed to U.S. setbacks in the occupation of Iraq (Erwin, 2004, 16). In fact, Canadian troops deploying to Afghanistan use American experiences in Iraq as incentive to properly conduct cultural awareness

training (Taylor, 2006, F3).

### The Preparations Currently Underway

The Marine Corps and other branches of the U.S. military have made great strides over the past two years in the cultural awareness training of its forces supporting the Long War. The commanding general of the Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) has designated cultural awareness training a top priority (Sappenfield, 2006, 1). Former Marine Corps Commandant General Hagee directed that cultural awareness be integrated into the Marine Corps' professional military education curriculum and all formal schools (Fein, 2005, 1). The Marine Corps established its CAOCL in Quantico, VA in 2005 to train Marines in cultural awareness in preparation for supporting the Long War. The U.S. Army has recently established the TRADOC Culture Center at the University of Military Intelligence in Fort Huachuca, AZ with a similar charter. General Mattis directed the creation of the CAOCL when commanding the Marine Corps Combat Development Command (Salmoni, 2006, 80) and can be expected to further emphasize the need for cultural awareness and language training by all U.S. forces in his new capacity at the Joint Forces Command.

As this chapter draws to a close, it is appropriate to review the themes that emerged from the review of the literature available on cultural awareness and military operations. The themes included cultural awareness in military operations matters, cultural awareness is more complex than simple do's and don'ts, the U.S. military failed to properly train its troops in cultural awareness through the first two years of OIF, and significant improvements are currently underway in military cultural awareness training. Each theme adds weight to the argument that the Marine Corps must institutionalize the

importance of cultural competency to military operations and that it must adopt a multi-faceted training program to develop this cultural competency. Looking ahead, Chapter Three will define the key terms and explore the methodology used to determine what are the key components of a cultural awareness training program the Marine Corps must adopt to properly prepare its operating forces to support the *Long War*.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology used to answer the primary research question. In doing so, the primary and secondary research questions and the research design will be reviewed. The conceptual model used for determining cultural awareness competency will be introduced and explained. Finally, key terms will be defined for use in the context of this thesis.

#### The Research Question

The research for this thesis focused on answering one primary and several secondary questions. The primary research question is: what are the key components of a cultural awareness training program the U.S. Marine Corps must adopt to properly prepare its operating forces to support the Long War? The secondary questions include: What are the components of the U.S. Marine Corps' current cultural awareness program? What are the requirements of the Long War as it pertains to the U.S. Marine Corps' operating forces? What historical examples are there of U.S. and foreign military units demonstrating cultural awareness during military operations? What type of training did they conduct? What type of cultural awareness training are the other services of the U.S. Armed Forces conducting?

Numerous sources of information were reviewed while researching the answers to these questions. Articles written in military professional publications in recent years were a primary source of research material. U.S. Army and Marine Corps doctrinal publications also provided a wealth of information related to the research questions. A

detailed review of the U.S. Marine Corps' current training program as provided by the U.S. Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning was a key component of the research. Other important sources of information included the U.S. Army's and U.S. Marine Corps' counter-insurgency and cultural awareness websites, the U.S. Army's Center For Lessons Learned (CALL), the U.S. Marine Corps' Center for Lessons Learned (MCCLL), the U.S. Marine Corps Warfighting Lab's X-files, and the U.S. Marine Corps' online training tool "MarineNet."

### The Conceptual Model

The conceptual model used in this thesis to evaluate cultural competency in the context of military operations is derived from several different models. The most prominently known of these models is Bloom's Taxonomy, shown in figure one, which applies to the cognitive domain of learning activities. Bloom's model explains the progression of cognitive learning from the basic level of being able to recall information to the most advanced level of being able to form judgments about the value of ideas or materials. There are six major categories, which are listed in order below, starting from the simplest behavior to the most complex. The categories can be thought of as degrees of difficulties. That is, the first one must be mastered before the next one can take place. Knowledge equates to being able to recall data while comprehension is being able to state a problem in one's own words. Analysis is being able to distinguish between facts and inferences and synthesis is the ability to build a pattern out of diverse elements (Clark, 2007).

# Bloom's Taxonomy

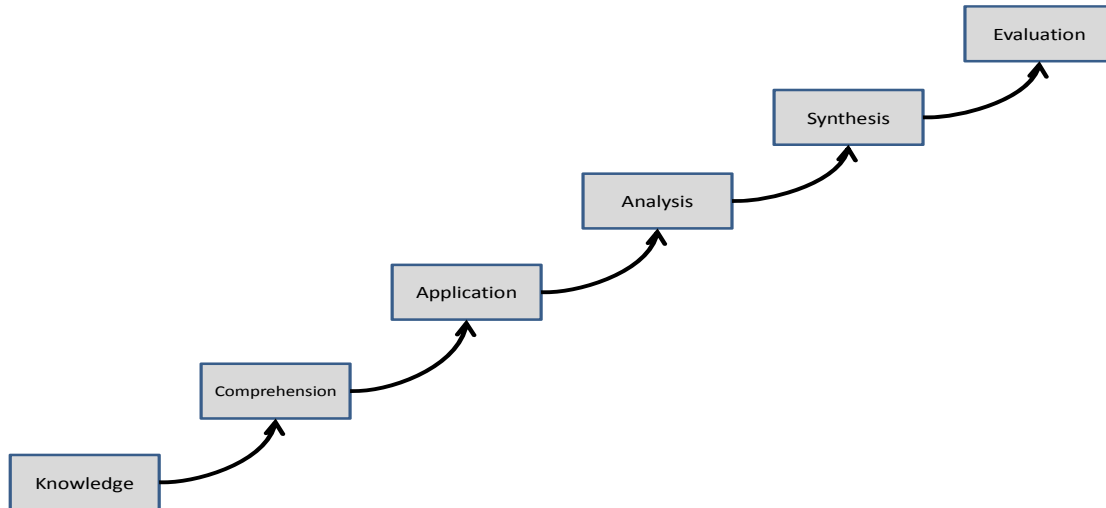


Figure 1. Bloom's Taxonomy

Source: Clark, *Bloom's Taxonomy* (<http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html>, 2007).

Bloom's Taxonomy model forms the foundation of the two models that most heavily influenced the conceptual model used in this thesis, specifically the Cultural Awareness Pyramid (Wunderle, 2006, 11) and the Information Hierarchy (MCDP 6, 1996, 67). The Information Hierarchy Model found in the Marine Corps' Command and Control Doctrinal Manual describes the progression of how raw data or information is transformed into an understanding of a subject or situation which enables a person to make a decision. The Cultural Awareness Pyramid applies Bloom's Taxonomy to cultural awareness in a military setting. Additionally, the Three-Step Approach to Cultural Understanding (Hernandez, 2007, 6), shown in figure two, provides a practical approach to teaching cultural awareness to military personnel. This three-step approach

requires the development of language skills, the academic study of the particular culture's history and practical application through immersion in the culture for an extended period of time.

## Three Step Approach to Cultural Understanding

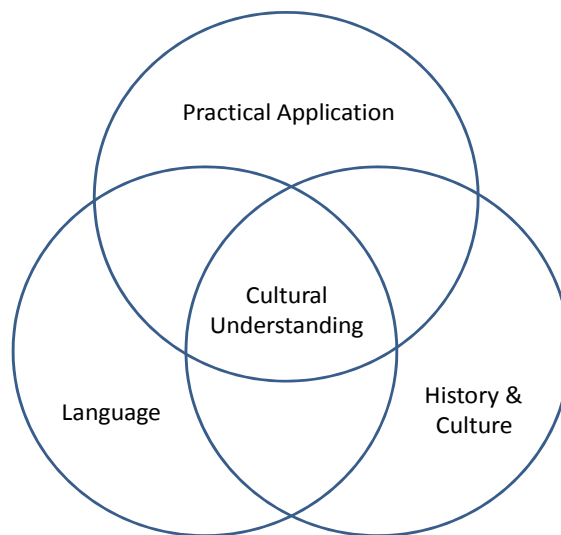


Figure 2. Three Step Approach to Cultural Understanding

*Source: Hernandez, Developing Cultural Understanding in Stability Operations: A Three Step Process* (Field Artillery Journal, 2007), 6.

A combination of the previously mentioned models forms the conceptual model used in this thesis to analyze the development of cultural competency in military operations. The model, shown in figure three, depicts the different levels of the Cultural Competence Hierarchy. Each level of the Cultural Competence Hierarchy represents different skill sets as well as levels of education and training. It will aid in determining



the requisite level of cultural competency relevant to rank, billet, and military specialty when conducting military operations overseas.

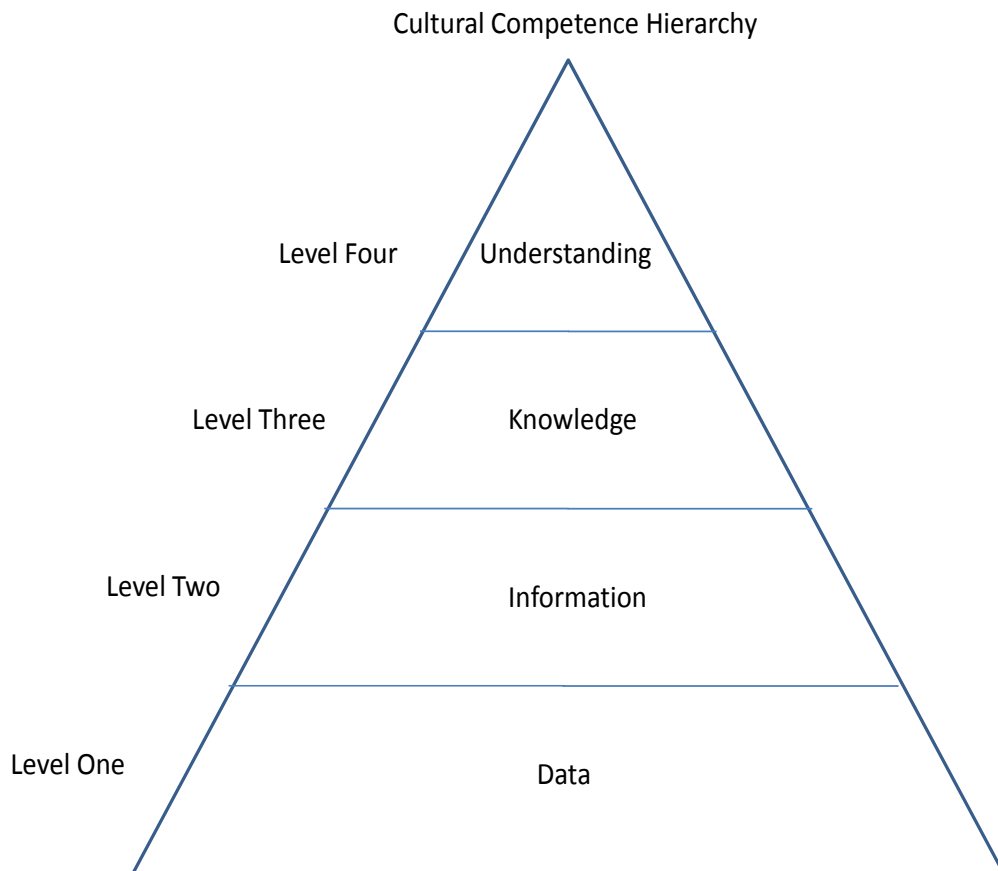


Figure 3. Cultural Competence Hierarchy

#### Key Terms Defined

- *Culture*: A shared set of traditions, belief systems, and behaviors. Culture is

shaped by many factors, including history, religion, ethnic identity, language, and nationality. Culture evolves in response to various pressures and influences and is learned through socialization; it is not inherent (Wunderle, 2006, 9).

- *Cultural Awareness*: The ability to recognize and understand the effects of culture on people's values and behaviors. In the military context, cultural awareness can be defined as the cognizance of cultural terrain for military operations and the connections between culture and warfighting. Cultural awareness implies an understanding of the need to consider cultural terrain in military operations, a knowledge of which cultural factors are important for a given situation and why, and a specified level of understanding for a target culture (Wunderle, 2006, 9).
- *Cultural Terrain*: Culture is simply another element of terrain in military operations. Cultural terrain parallels geographic terrain for military considerations. This term is used in the context of military operational planning when allocating resources and identifying centers of gravity and critical vulnerabilities (Connable, 2005, 7).
- *Center of Gravity*: Primary source of moral or physical strength, power, and resistance (Strange, 2002, ix).
- *Critical Vulnerability*: Critical requirements or components thereof which are deficient, or vulnerable to neutralization, interdiction or attack in a manner achieving decisive results (Strange, 2002, ix).
- *Military Cultural Factors*: Elements of culture that apply to military planning and operations which have the capacity to affect military operations. They include

religion, ethnicity, language, customs, values, practices, perceptions and assumption, and driving causes like economy and security. All these factors affect the thinking and motivation of the individual or group and make up the cultural terrain of military operations (Connable, 2005, 8).

- *Cultural Competency*: The appropriate level of cultural awareness and language skills needed to successfully plan and execute military operations in a specific foreign culture. Cultural competency applies to service members of all ranks and responsibilities, although training required to achieve cultural competency differs based on rank and billet.
- *Cultural Competency Training*: Training of military forces to ensure they are prepared to operate in a specific foreign culture (Connable, 2005, 11).
- *Data*: Signals which have not been processed, correlated, integrated, evaluated, or interpreted in any way (MCDP 6, 1996, 66). Observations by individuals on cultural and human characteristics are raw data (Connable, 2005, 13).
- *Information*: Data processed into or displayed into a format understandable to the people that must use them (MCDP 6, 1996, 66). Cultural and human factors are information (Connable, 2005, 13).
- *Knowledge*: Data that has been analyzed to provide meaning and value (MCDP 6, 1996, 68). Cultural variations and manifestations - which include cultural behaviors, values, and cognition – are examples of knowledge (Connable, 2005, 13).
- *Understanding*: Knowledge that has been synthesized and applied to a specific situation to gain a deeper level of awareness of that situation (MCDP 6, 1996, 69).

- *Operational Culture*: Governed by the context of a particular operation, it consists of operationally relevant behavior and expressed attitudes of groups within indigenous forces against or with whom services members operate, civilians among whom service members operate, and indigenous groups whom service members wish to influence; the factors which determine these operationally relevant behavior and attitudes; and the historical mechanisms which shape these factors (Salmoni, 2006, 81).
- *U.S. Marine Corps Operating Forces*: Defined in the context of this study as units and individuals assigned to either I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF), or III Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF).
- *Long War*: Term used by the administration of U.S. President George W. Bush referring to U.S. actions against various governments and terrorist organizations, as a reaction to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks of 2001 (Graham and White, 2006, 8).
- *Small Wars*: Operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of the United States (Small Wars Manual, 1940, 1).

This chapter explained the research methodology used to answer the primary research question of this thesis. As part of that explanation, the research questions were

reviewed and key terms were defined. The next chapter will establish what it means to be culturally competent.

## CHAPTER 4

### WHAT IT TAKES TO BE CULTURALLY COMPETENT

Before the Marine Corps can adopt a comprehensive training program to develop cultural competency within its operating forces, what constitutes cultural competency must first be determined. The necessary training and skill sets that define cultural competency differ based on a Marine's rank and functional specialty while participating in the Long War. Marines engaged in the Long War fall into three categories: doers, planners, or a combination of both (referred to as combos). These categories help determine what level of cultural awareness and language training are necessary to produce a culturally competent Marine. As one might guess, the requirements fall throughout the Cultural Competence Hierarchy, as seen in figure four.

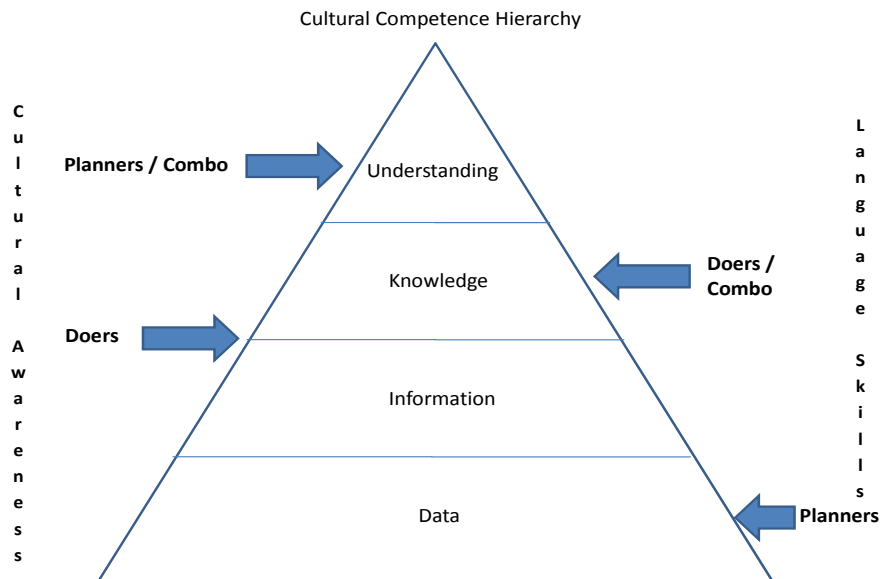


Figure 4. Required Levels of Cultural Competence

It is important to remember that cultural competency has two components: cultural awareness and language skills. As depicted in the diagram, planners must achieve understanding of the culture in which military operations will occur yet require little or no language skills. However, the Marines in the Doers and Combo categories must obtain considerable language proficiency and develop either a high level of information approaching knowledge (for the doers) or understanding (for the combo) of the target culture. The remainder of this chapter examines which Marines constitute each category and what training they need to attain cultural competence in order to successfully participate in the Long War.

### The Doers

Marines that interact closely with foreign populations while conducting military operations comprise the Doers category. They execute the operations developed by the planners and decision-makers. They include Marines of all ranks, although they are predominantly junior enlisted Marines and non-commissioned officers. Approximately sixty-seven percent of all active duty Marines holds the rank of corporal (E-4) or below (Wimp, 2007, 10). It is only logical based on this high percentage that this group would interact more with civilians during military operations than more senior Marines. Rank alone does not determine a Marine's status as a Doer, although it the most significant determinant. A Marine's specialty or billet assignment also plays heavily in his role as a Doer. A Marine must be assigned to a position that will regularly bring him into close

interaction with members of the foreign population – both civilian and military, either friendly, hostile, or neutral. These Marines typically come from the combat arms specialties such as infantry, artillery, engineers, and security units. Non-combat arms Marines can also be put in this category as well, including military policemen, truck drivers, logisticians, communicators, and interpreters. Any Marine can be classified as a Doer as long as he interacts with the foreign population while conducting operations without being a decision-maker in the context of planning or directing those operations.

### Military Cultural Factors

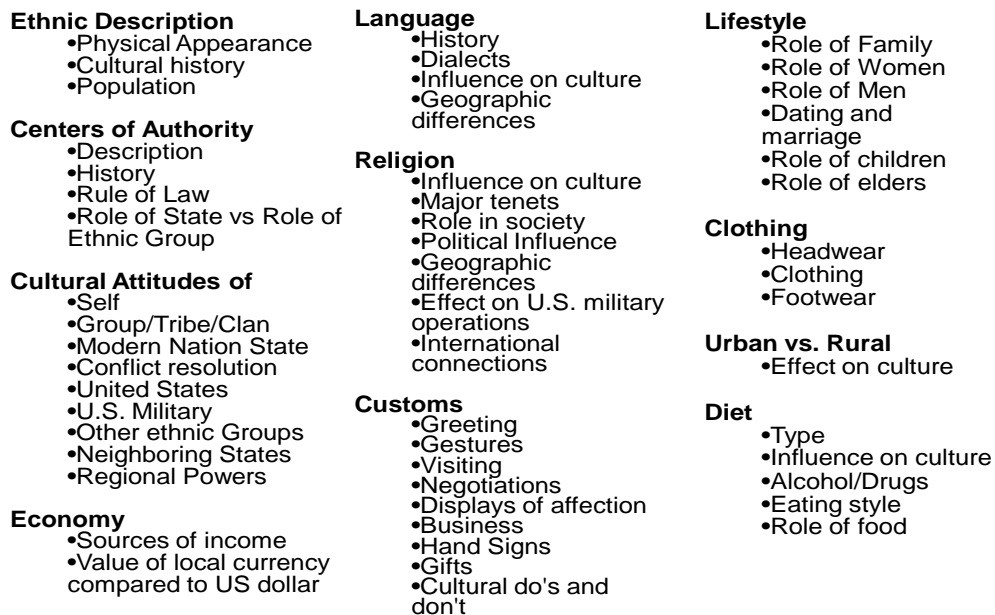


Figure 5. Military Cultural Factors

Source: Connable, *Cultural Awareness for Military Operations* (2005), 9.

Marines in the Doer category need specific skills and training to ensure they are culturally competent. Referring back to figure four, Doers need to attain a level of



cultural awareness that lies somewhere between information and knowledge. These Marines must be familiar with the military cultural factors of the area in which they operate, a collection of which are found in figure five above (Connable, 2005, 9). Familiarity with these factors equates to information on the cultural competence hierarchy. Marines that are cognizant of their cultural surroundings and act in a manner as compatible as possible with the local culture while accomplishing the assigned military mission represent the knowledge level on the hierarchy. The following example represents the different levels of cultural awareness for the Doer:

- Level One / Data – A Marine on patrol observes that several of the Iraqi men standing in the marketplace are wearing head dresses.
- Level Two / Information – The Marine knows the head dresses represent different positions of authority within the local tribal culture.
- Level Three / Knowledge – The Marine identifies the man holding the highest level of authority based on his head dress and approaches him to initiate a dialogue about recent activities in the area.

Marines with this level of cultural awareness will be better able to conduct military operations effectively and efficiently among people of a foreign culture than those without this training.

Marines operating among a foreign population should be able to verbally communicate with the local populace. This specifically applies to the Marines in the Doer category. This is not to say that the Marines must be fluent in the local language; however, they should have a basic understanding of the language of the people among whom they are operating. Ideally, they should possess limited capacity to speak and

comprehend the spoken language of their area. The Defense Language Institute (DLI) produced the pocket-sized Iraqi Language Survival Guide in July of 2005 for troops deploying to Iraq. It contains common words and phrases broken into twenty-two categories (e.g. greetings and introductions, interrogation, numbers, days of the week, directions, emergency terms, medical terms, military ranks, relatives, weather, and general military terms) that a serviceman could expect to use when interacting with an Iraqi while conducting routine military operations. The DLI survival language guides should be the minimum standard of language skills attained by the Doers deploying in support of the Long War.

### The Planners

The second category of Marines, the Planners, is a much smaller group than the Doers. Primarily, the Planners group is comprised of field grade officers (O-4 through O-6) and above. These Marines may or may not be assigned to the theater of operations for which they are developing plans. For example, many members of the U.S. Central Command planning staff are stationed in Florida but are developing operational plans for the Iraq and Afghanistan theaters of operations. The key requirement for a Marine to be categorized as a Planner is that he be assigned to a staff responsible for developing plans to be executed by the operating forces in the Long War. The Marines in the Planners category are most likely assigned to the staff of a division, Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), Marine component of a combatant commander (e.g. Marine Forces Europe), a combatant command (e.g. U.S. Central Command), or Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC). It is important to note that the planners are not likely, in their capacity as planners, to have direct contact with the population of the area for which they are

planning military operations. This is a major distinction between the Planners and the Doers.

The Planners physical separation from the culture of the operational area does not diminish the importance of cultural awareness of the operational area. The Planners must actually have a higher degree of cultural awareness of the target culture than the Doers. They must achieve understanding of the target culture - the highest level of cultural awareness in the hierarchy. These Marines are responsible for developing strategies and objectives that are logical and grounded in the reality of the culture in the area. A better understanding of the Iraqi culture prior to the 2003 U.S.-led invasion may have resulted in operational plans designed to mitigate the looting and lawlessness seen in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. Culturally attuned planners may have anticipated the flashpoints of violence in the Anbar province while recognizing the Kurdish regions in Northern Iraq would need fewer coalition troops to maintain peace.

The single-most important responsibility of the Planners is to develop attainable military objectives and realistic plans of how to achieve them, part of which is the allocation of appropriate resources (i.e. forces, equipment, funds, etc...). Essential to accomplishing this feat is a complete understanding of the military cultural factors of the region in order to anticipate not only how the enemy will react, but also the civilian population. This is not to say that cultural awareness will allow the Planners to predict how the enemy will react; the assertion is simply that a culturally attuned Planner is more likely to make correct assumptions and decisions about human behavior in the target culture than a person ignorant of the norms of human behavior there. Military planners

who, determining that cultural sensitivities will cause negative repercussions within the civilian population that outweigh the potential tactical gains, decide against a major offensive targeting insurgents in the sacred city of Najaf during the holy month of Ramadan illustrate the key role of cultural awareness in military planning.

Language skills are far less important to a culturally competent planner as cultural awareness of the operational area. It is not essential for planners to be able to communicate with the local populace in the operational area because they do not, as a general rule, interact with the local populace. Therefore, the only real requirement for planners is to know what language is spoken in the operational area; this equates to Level One / Data on the cultural competence hierarchy. It is necessary for the planners to know the spoken language in the operational area because they are responsible for determining the requirements for and allocating such resources as contracted interpreters and military linguists. Knowing which languages and dialects are used within the operational area and by who will also assist planners in understanding cultural connections between different groups of people within the population, which may affect the military plans they develop.

### The Combos

The Marines that compose the third category of participants in the Long War are a combination of the previous two categories – the Doers and the Planners. These Marines execute the operations developed by the planners, yet are also able to influence the development and conduct of those operations by nature of their rank, position, or specialty. These Marines operate at the tactical level and the majority are unit leaders, from squad all the way to division-level. They are the decision-makers who determine which operations to conduct and the details of those operations. They include the squad

leader who must develop and lead a patrol in an urban area and the division commander who must approve an operations plan developed by his staff and direct its execution, and unit leaders of all ranks in between. Also included in this category are members of the intelligence community, particularly counter-intelligence Marines assigned to Human Exploitation Teams (HETs).

Military advisors to foreign militaries are some of the most important members of the Combo category in the context of the Long War. These Marines fill critical roles in the long-term U.S. military strategies for both Iraq and Afghanistan, which is to build the capabilities of the Iraqi and Afghan militaries and then turn over security responsibilities to them as U.S. forces redeploy. However, this advisor duty is not limited to Iraq and Afghanistan. The Marine Corps plans to establish a Marine Corps Training and Advisor Group (MCTAG) within the next few years (Abbott, 2008, 7), thereby solidifying the military advisor mission as a permanent task for the operating forces. The Marines assigned to the MCTAG will act as advisors to the militaries of partner nations in order to increase the capabilities of those militaries. These advisors share the same training requirements as the other Marines in the Combo category. They will be expected to aid in the planning and execution of operations by the foreign military units to which they are assigned. To be effective in this capacity, these advisors must achieve the highest level of cultural competency required of the Marines participating in the Long War.

All Marines in the Combo category must achieve a high level of cultural awareness in order to effectively plan and direct military operations in the Long War. They need the same level of awareness – Level Four / Understanding – as the Marines in the Planners category. The reason for this is two-fold: they have a role in the

development of the plans to be executed and they must also understand civilian and enemy behavior as they direct operations among a foreign population so that they make appropriate decisions and give correct orders to subordinates. The following excerpt from a story about Lieutenant Colonel Chris Hughes, a battalion commander in the U.S. Army's 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, during the initial invasion of Iraq in 2003 illustrates the importance of a unit leader being culturally aware while directing operations among a foreign population.

LtCol Hughes led soldiers from the 101st Airborne toward Najaf, one of the holy cities in Iraq, to secure the town and protect two things: the Ali Shrine, the purported burial site for Noah and Adam; and the Grand Ayatollah Sistani, a Shi'i cleric who had been put under house arrest by Saddam Hussein. As he and 200 of his men approached the Ayatollah's home, conditions were perfect. The Ayatollah knew they were coming, and the crowd was friendly. But suddenly everything changed. Unknown to him, Baathist agitators had begun to circulate the claim that the Americans weren't there to protect their religious leader – there were there to invade the mosque. In a matter of seconds, the friendly crowd became angry, shouting, “In city – yes. In city – OK. Mosque – NO!” More people gathered. The crowd began to surge toward the troops. Rocks began to fly. Hughes' troops, who hadn't slept in two or three days, were tense and armed to the teeth. A bloodbath seemed imminent. Everyone knew that Hughes' response would color the way the Iraqis would view the American forces from that day on. So what did he do? In the midst of all the agitation, he raised his rifle upside down, to indicate that he had no intention of firing it. Then, he told his men to “Take a knee.” They must have wondered what in the world he was doing, but they trusted him. And 200 soldiers took a knee. Then he told them to lower their weapons ... and SMILE. And they did. The crowd quieted, and some began to smile back. Finally, he told his warriors to back up, turn around, and walk away. As a last gesture, he placed his flat hand against his heart in the traditional Islamic gesture meaning “peace be with you”. He said, “Have a nice day,” and walked away ... Later on, once the confusion was cleared up and the agitators were removed, they entered Najaf peacefully. Mission accomplished (Bacon, 2003, 1).

Lieutenant Colonel Hughes' cultural awareness certainly influenced his assessment of the situation and enabled him to make a decision that de-escalated the civilian hostility yet

still accomplish his assigned mission. Marines in the Combo category can attain this level of cultural awareness by studying the military cultural factors of their operational area, just as the Planners do.

While the Marines in the Combo category share the same cultural awareness requirements as the Planners, their language skills must be equal to those Marines in the Doers category. Although unit leaders may often have an interpreter assigned to them, it is important for them to speak and comprehend the local language to the level prescribed in the DLI survival language guides. These Marines must be prepared in the event that interpreters are not available. Additionally, Marines that make the effort to converse with someone in his native language will possibly gain favor with many of those they meet while conducting their operations. For this same reason, more senior officers need to learn basic greetings and introductions because they will likely work closely with senior civilian counterparts within the operational area. Attempting to address someone in their native language is viewed as a sign of respect and may assist in portraying Marines in the operational area as less condescending and more appealing to the local population (Harder, 2006, 1A). There are many tangible benefits derived from speaking the local language and no obvious disadvantages.

In summary, not all Marines participating in the Long War require the same training to be culturally competent. What constitutes cultural competency is entirely dependent on what role a particular Marine plays in the Long War. Marines who interact with members of a foreign population while conducting operations at the tactical level, without being involved in the planning or directing of those operations, need a basic comprehension of the native language and a detailed knowledge of the local military

cultural factors. The Marines who plan the operations of the Long War but do not interact with the population in the operational area need a complete understanding of the military cultural factors in the operational area but little or no language skills. Finally, the Marines involved in the planning and execution of operations at the tactical level must possess a limited capacity to speak with the people they meet and a full understanding of the military cultural factors of their operational area.



## CHAPTER 5

### THE MARINE CORPS' CURRENT TRAINING PROGRAM

The Marine Corps has an impressive cultural awareness training program in place today compared to what existed before the start of OIF. However, impressive does not necessarily equate to adequate. The current program attempts to develop cultural competence through a two-pronged approach. First, the Marine Corps has introduced cultural awareness and language training to its professional military education (PME) system. Second, CAOCL has implemented pre-deployment cultural competency training for units headed to Iraq and Afghanistan. While this approach addresses the immediate needs of the operating forces to deploy with a certain level of cultural competency training, it falls short of a long-term solution to the Marine Corps' cultural competency deficiencies as it prosecutes the Long War. The remainder of this chapter will examine the current training initiatives implemented since the beginning of OIF, focusing on the PME system and pre-deployment unit training.

#### Entry-Level Training

The training of newly commissioned officers and enlisted Marines is a multifaceted process with different purposes and goals for each group. As such, second lieutenants train in a broad range of subjects and skills commensurate with the type and level of responsibility they will face in the operating forces. Enlisted Marines have much less responsibility upon completion of their entry level training and their training curriculum reflects this fact. Not only does the extent of the training in common areas differ, the actual subjects and skills taught to officers and enlisted Marines differ as well.

However, the TECOM has introduced cultural awareness into the curriculum both officer and enlisted entry-level training. This introduction does more to institutionalize the importance of cultural awareness than it does to develop cultural competency because cultural competency applies to a specific culture whereas the new curriculum is generic.

Entry-level training for enlisted Marines includes minimal formal cultural awareness training. After completing basic recruit training, all enlisted Marines report to either an Infantry Training Battalion (ITB) - for those with an infantry military occupational specialty (MOS) - or a Marine Combat Training (MCT) Battalion - for those with a non-infantry MOS. The Marines assigned to ITB receive fifty-nine days of infantry training and are then assigned to a unit in the operating forces (SOI Command Brief, 2008, 12). The Marines assigned to MCT receive twenty-nine days of basic combat training before being assigned as a student to their MOS school (SOI Command Brief, 2008, 11). Enlisted Marines do not receive a specific cultural awareness class but are introduced to operational culture during other classes in the curriculum.

The Marine Corps has also made a marginal foray into entry-level cultural awareness training with the initial schooling of its commissioned officers. All newly commissioned Marine officers must complete the twenty-six week Basic Officer Course (BOC) at The Basic School (TBS) in Quantico, VA before receiving an MOS and being assigned to an operational unit. Cultural awareness is a focus of instruction as it relates to the “current combat environment” according to TBS command brief available at the TBS website. Of the nearly sixteen-hundred training hours during BOC, two hours deal with cultural awareness in the form of an introductory class that discusses cultural factors such as communication, religion, social networks, geography, clothing, residential

patterns, diet, and identity (Russ Rybka, April 22, 2008, personal email to author). Due to its generic nature, the BOC cultural awareness training serves more to institutionalize the importance of cultural awareness in military operations than it does to develop operational cultural awareness specific to a certain region or culture. As such, the BOC training is more focused on cultural awareness than cultural competency. At best, the students receive anecdotal information based on the instructors' experiences in OIF and OEF according to the chief instructor at TBS (Russ Rybka, April 22, 2008, personal email to author).

Entry-level language training has existed for several decades in the Marine Corps, although it is restricted to a relatively small number of enlisted Marines. Specifically, only those enlisted Marines designated to receive a linguist MOS receive entry-level language training, conducted at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, CA. The Marine Corps then assigns these Marines to an intelligence unit or a signals intelligence unit. More senior enlisted Marines, typically sergeants and staff sergeants, who transfer to the counter-intelligence MOS also attend language training at the Defense Language Institute. Officers currently receive no formal language skill training as part of the curriculum at the Basic Officer Course or their follow-on MOS school.

### Professional Military Education

As Marines progress in rank, they have the opportunity (sometimes a requirement) to attend professional military education (PME) schools to further develop their professional competency. Both enlisted Marines and officers have a series of PME requirements to fulfill as they advance in rank. The enlisted PME path consists of, in order: Corporals Course, Sergeants Course, Career Course (for staff sergeants),

Advanced Course (for gunnery sergeants), and First Sergeants Course. The officer PME path consists of: Career-Level School (Expeditionary Warfare School or sister-service equivalent), Intermediate-Level School (Command and Staff College or sister-service equivalent), and Top-Level School (Marine Corps War College or sister-service equivalent). The PME process is similar to entry-level training in that there are different objectives for officers and enlisted Marines. While the concept of cultural awareness is merely introduced to Marines in entry-level training, some students at the PME schools develop cultural competency based on curriculum changes made over the past couple of years.

A review of the curriculums found on the enlisted PME website reveals that the enlisted PME program falls short as a venue for cultural awareness training. Of the five different courses, not one lists cultural awareness as a training objective in its curriculum. The enlisted PME courses have undergone significant changes during the past couple of years to strengthen their emphasis on warfighting and to reduce the training hours spent on other subjects such as drill and ceremonies. Although this emphasis on warfighting is a positive development, the fact remains that enlisted Marines receive no cultural awareness training in a formal school environment, either entry-level or PME.

The process begun at The Basic School of embedding in the minds of Marine officers the importance of cultural competency in military operations continues through the officer PME program. Marine Captains attending the ten-month long EWS receive instruction to prepare them to either command at the company-level or serve as a primary staff officer within their MOS (EWS Command Brief, 2007, 3). The objective of the ‘operational culture’ training is for the Expeditionary Warfare School students to

demonstrate an understanding of how cultural factors affect military operations (Donald Wright, March 20, 2008, personal email to author). The students receive six and a half hours of classroom instruction and guided discussions designed to understand and analyze culture and its relationship to military operations. The students then receive an additional five hours of instruction focused on Middle East culture as it relates to military operations in Iraq. The first block of instruction aims to establish cultural awareness while the second block of training aims to build a marginal level of cultural competence for the Iraqi theater of operations.

Cultural awareness in a military context receives significant attention at the next level of officer PME as well. The Command and Staff College - informed by the study of history, language and culture - educates and trains its joint, multinational, and interagency professionals in order to produce skilled warfighting leaders able to overcome diverse 21st Century security challenges (Julian Alford, March 12, 2008 personal email to author). While the curriculum at the Expeditionary Warfare School continues to reinforce that culture matters in military operations, the Command and Staff College curriculum makes the transition from emphasizing cultural awareness to developing cultural competency. The students study operational culture in three different modules spread across the ten-month academic year. The three modules are 1) Introduction to Operational Culture, 2) Operational Culture in Sub-Saharan Africa, 3) Operational Culture in the Middle East and account for twenty-nine training days in the curriculum. Each module consists of five themes: 1) Political Structures and Leadership, 2) Social Organization and Power, 3) Culture and Local Economics, 4) Culture Belief

Systems, and 5) Culture and Environment (Julian Alford, March 12, 2008 personal email to author).

The limited availability of language training at the entry-level improves marginally in the numerous Marine Corps PME institutions. Currently, there is no language training in the curriculum at any of the enlisted PME schools. Nor is there any language training in the curriculum of EWS. However, the Command and Staff College provides one-week (forty hours) of language training to all of its students. Instructors from the Defense Language Institute provide instruction in Arabic, French, Chinese, and Korean. In addition to the classroom instruction, nearly seventy of the one-hundred and sixty U.S. military students participate in immersion trips to Egypt, Tunisia, China, and Korea (country visited correlates with the language studied). Use of “Rosetta Stone” and “Pimsleur” computer based training aids reinforces classroom instruction.

#### Unit / Organizational Training

The Marine Corps has focused much of its effort in developing cultural competency in its operating forces at the unit level. This focus has several reasons. The top factor driving the Marine Corps to concentrate on the units during their pre-deployment training cycles is the high rate, or operational tempo (optempo), at which units have been deploying in support of OEF and OIF during the past five years. Faced with decreasing pre-deployment training time and limited resources (subject matter expertise, instructors, developed curriculums and training programs, etc.) available to provide useful cultural awareness training to Marine units deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan, the Marine Corps formed the CAOCL in 2005 to equip Marines with operationally relevant regional, culture, and language knowledge to allow them to plan

and operate successfully in the joint and combined expeditionary environment (CAOCL website, n.d.). CAOCL is continually increasing its capabilities to educate and train Marines towards cultural competence in the region they will operate.

All Marine units currently deploying to Iraq participate in a mandatory CAOCL-sponsored training package called Tactical Iraqi Culture. The training consists of nine classes totaling fifteen-hours of lecture and eight-hours of practical application. The purpose of the Tactical Iraqi Culture training package is to provide Marines with the cultural knowledge necessary to effectively operate in the Iraqi operating environment. The specifics of the course include eight major areas (CAOCL website, n.d.):

- *Operational Culture and Operation Iraqi Freedom.* This two-hour class familiarizes Marines with the operational environment in OIF and how knowledge of Iraqi culture will improve unit success on the battlefield.
- *Cultural Assumptions and History.* This three-hour class strives to make Marines aware of cultural assumptions and expectations prevalent in the United States and Marine Corps. Marines learn how Iraqi culture differs from these unconscious assumptions through discussions of stereotypes, Iraqi history, current Iraqi civilian society, Iraqi values and Iraqi motivations.
- *Religion and OIF.* This three-hour class provides an introduction to the tenants of Islam and the differences between Sunni and Shiite Islam. Marines are instructed on proper behavior in mosques, Islamic holidays, how to converse with a Muslim about his religion and how religion affects the Iraqi Security Forces.

- *Kin Networks.* This three-hour class teaches Marines the basics of kin networks and how this knowledge can be used to influence the area of operations. The structure, characteristics and ways of interacting with Iraqi kin networks are discussed. This course describes how kin networks affect an Iraqi's decision-making process and their influence on the Iraqi Security Forces.
- *Gender and Age.* This three-hour class familiarizes the Marines with Iraqi cultural norms for interacting with women and children. Marines learn about Iraqi expectations regarding interactions with women and children, how the treatment of women affects the honor of Iraqi males and strategies for successfully interacting with Iraqi women and children in different operational settings.
- *How to Use a Translator.* This three-hour class teaches Marines proper methods for the use of translators and interpreters in different operational settings. Marines learn about the different types of translators, cultural factors that may affect a translator's performance, how to establish a strong relationship with a translator and how to effectively use a translator.
- *Culture Stress.* This ninety-minute class introduces the Marines to the stresses of conducting missions immersed in a foreign culture and language. Marines learn coping strategies for successful living in foreign environments, the signs of culture shock and techniques for helping other Marines who are victims of culture shock.
- *Relationships and Communication.* This three-hour class teaches Marines



how to successfully interact with Iraqis in the operational setting and develop lasting relationships. Marines learn the characteristics of Iraqi communication in both formal and informal settings including use of body language and emotional cues. Strategies are provided for developing relationships, conducting an initial conversation, conducting negotiations, criticizing, questioning and discussing sensitive topics.

In addition to the classes listed above, CAOCL also provides deploying units with distance learning materials with topics including negotiations and bilateral meetings, Information Operations at the battalion level, mapping the human terrain at the battalion level and cultural considerations when occupying Iraqi homes. CAOCL's Tactical Iraqi Culture training is the most effective Marine Corps training program intended to develop cultural competence in its units deploying in support of OIF.

CAOCL has developed a similar program intended to prepare units for deployment to Afghanistan in support of OEF. The program is called Tactical Afghan Culture and consists of thirty training hours. The five days of training consists of the following (CAOCL website, n.d.):

- *Day 1* covers Afghan military history, current conditions in Afghanistan and Afghanistan's ethnic groups.
- *Day 2* covers languages, political groups and the tribal/political map of the provinces.
- *Day 3* covers basic Pastoon culture, Pashtunwali, walk-through of a typical mission and a discussion of Afghan relationships and communication.

- *Day 4* covers battlefield recognition, meeting and greeting, culture of the insurgent and counterinsurgency.
- *Day 5* covers building a Local Tactical Intelligence Network, culture for the SERE environment and demonstrations. The day ends with a practical application lesson called "The Jirga Room."

As with the Tactical Iraqi Culture package, this training occurs at the unit's home station. The training is mandatory for all units deploying to Afghanistan and represents the best formal training the Marine Corps currently has available to develop cultural competence for the Afghanistan theater of operations.

While Tactical Iraqi Culture and Tactical Afghan Culture are mandatory training for OIF and OEF units, they do not represent the capstone of cultural competence training for these units. All deploying units must complete a readiness training exercise at either the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center at Twenty-Nine Palms, CA or the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center in Bridgeport, CA. An integral component of these evaluation exercises is testing the unit's ability to operate in a model Iraqi or Afghan environment, complete with Iraqis and Afghans participating as role players. These exercises test individual Marines' ability to handle cultural sensitive situations and evaluate unit leaders' and staffs' ability to properly assess the cultural terrain of each training scenario and to plan and execute operations based on this cultural terrain analysis.

In addition to the CAOCL-sponsored training and the capstone evaluation exercises, the Marine Corps can utilize other cultural awareness training venues, either at the individual or unit level. The Department of State Foreign Service Institute,

responsible for training Foreign Service Officers and Specialists as well as Peace Corps volunteers, is a respected source of education. The Naval Postgraduate School provides cultural training to Department of Defense foreign and regional area officers. It also assists the Marine Corps by providing mobile training teams to instruct deploying units. The Marine Corps Intelligence Agency provides products and training to the operating forces highlighting cultural impacts on military operations. Finally, the United States Army has developed a robust cultural training program over the last few years, run out of the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Culture Center, which provides PME and unit / organizational training.

The Marine Corps is currently leveraging the capabilities of the internet and information technology to expand the availability of cultural training to all Marines. The Marines Corps internet-based distance learning system, MarineNet, offers a variety of cultural training courses of instruction from several different sources. Specifically, MarineNet offers courses from both the Defense Language Institute and the Department of State Foreign Service Institute. It also offers cultural classes from the United States Army among a variety of other cultural awareness oriented courses. While clearly not a substitute for the CAOCL-sponsored training, MarineNet's web-based training is a means to further develop the skill and knowledge base provided by CAOCL.

CAOCL also provides critical language training to units and individuals deploying to either Iraq or Afghanistan. For those Marines deploying to Iraq, CAOCL offers the Tactical Iraqi Language package which teaches operationally relevant language skills. There are five different courses offered, each one with a different focus based on

the operational needs of the deploying Marines. The five courses are (CAOCL website, n.d.):

- *Course 1 (General Language)* teaches conversational and operational language such as patrol, tactical check point (TCP), house search, weapons, weapon components, commands, commander engagement and Iraqi Security Forces operations.
- *Course 2 (Civil Affairs)* provides a specific language curriculum for civil affairs personnel.
- *Course 3 (Detainee Handling)* provides a specific language curriculum for personnel that will conduct detainee handling.
- *Course 4 (Senior Officers)* provides a specific language curriculum for senior officers (lieutenant colonels and above). Topics covered include formal greetings and salutations, military ranks, political titles and how to use a translator.
- *Course 5 (Transition Teams)* provides Marines deploying to Iraq as part of a transition team a total of one hundred and twenty-three training hours over four weeks. It includes sixty-hours of face-to-face instruction, forty-hours of lab time and twenty-three hours of culture. During training Marines are taught the fundamentals of how to read, write and conduct basic conversations in Arabic. Examples of the topics covered are: greetings/farewells, basic and cardinal directions, government and politics, military staff, emergency terms, occupational terms and military terms.

CAOCL conducts all of the language skill training at the deploying unit's home station,

similar to the Tactical Iraqi culture package. The language training is reinforced with distance learning materials which include eighteen computer based training (CBT) CDs that cover conversational Iraqi dialogues and can be used to advance or sustain current language skills (CAOCL website, n.d.).

The CAOCL sponsored language training package for Marines deploying to Afghanistan is even more robust than the Tactical Iraqi Language package. As described on its website, CAOCL offers eight different courses in both Pashto and Dari (the two predominant languages of Afghanistan). Courses two through four are meant to be taken as a series. Marines who complete all three courses will know the numbers, sounds and shapes of the alphabet and be able to have a basic conversation. The eight courses include:

- *Course 1* is a one-week course consisting of forty training hours. Marines will learn conversational and operational language for patrolling, Tactical Check Points (TCP), cordon and knock/searches, weapons, weapons components, commands, commander engagement and Afghan National Army (ANA) operations.
- *Course 2* consists of twenty training days with four hours of class and two hours of lab a day. This course is grammar-based and includes ten hours of study materials provided at the end of the course. Topics include greetings, introductions, farewells, military ranks, directions, vehicle searches/check points, cordon and knocks/searches and safety/security.
- *Course 3* consists of twenty training days with four hours of class and two hours of lab a day. This course is grammar-based and includes ten hours

of study materials provided at the end of the course. Topics include calendar, social and government titles, numbers, colors, medical emergencies, roadside emergencies/blockage, weather and food. The prerequisite for this course is the successful completion of course two.

- *Course 4* consists of twenty training days with four hours of class and two hours of lab a day. This course is grammar-based and includes ten hours of study materials provided at the end of the course. Topics include shopping, geography, body parts, descriptions, family members, weapons/military terms, vehicles, roads and bridges. The prerequisite for this course is the successful completion of course three.
- *Course 5 (Civil Affairs)* is a five-day course that teaches language skills specifically developed for use in civil affairs operations in Afghanistan.
- *Course 6 (Detainee Handling)* is a five-day course that teaches language skills specifically developed for Marines handling detainees in detention facilities. This course will provide Marines the language necessary to control detainees in the initial receiving phases as well as during their daily routine.
- *Course 7 (General Officer Course)* is a ten-hour course developed for General Officers deploying to Afghanistan. Topics include formal greetings and salutations, military ranks, political titles and how to use a translator.
- *Course 8 (Transition Teams)* is a four-week course with a total of one hundred and thirty training hours. It includes sixty hours of face-to-face

instruction, thirty hours of labtime and thirty hours of culture. Transition Team Pashto/Dari is for Marines deploying to Afghanistan in an advisory capacity. Students will receive an extra ten hours of study materials after the course has been completed.

Similar to the Tactical Iraqi Language package, units conduct all training at their home station. CAOCL provides computer based training modules on three-CD sets containing the twenty-four lessons that comprise courses two-four in both Dari and Pashto so Marines can sustain and advance their language skills.

There are numerous other language training resources available to Marines as they prepare to deploy in addition to the CAOCL-run training packages. Among the DOD programs available, the Defense Language Institute is perhaps the most prominent. Although it is infeasible to send Marines to Monterey to attend DLI's comprehensive language courses in between deployments, DLI is able to provide limited support to deploying units with mobile training teams that provide language training at the unit's home station – very similar to that sponsored by CAOCL. Another resource is the Joint Language University. The Joint Language University is a language learning and support portal where resources and materials are brought together from across the Federal Government, Department of Defense and Academia (JLU website, n.d.). Marines can establish online accounts and gain access to thousands of hours of language instruction based on authentic source texts and audio recordings as well as tools and resources compiled by cooperating organizations. Non-DOD resources include web-based language training offered by the Department of State's Foreign Service Institute. A number of commercial resources such as "Rosetta Stone" are also available to Marines

desiring to sharpen their language skills before deployment. Ultimately, there is no shortage of resources available to Marines to study the different languages of the region to which they will deploy. The limiting factor to learning the language is almost always time available versus the time necessary.

CAOCL recently unveiled the Career Marine Regional Studies program, perhaps the Marine Corps' most ambitious and long term commitment to developing and maintaining cultural competence in its operating forces. The goal of the program is to establish within the operating forces a resident expertise of numerous regions within which Marines can expect to operate. The resulting cultural competency of these officers and non-commissioned officers will enable them to plan and execute operations while taking into account the effects the culture of the indigenous population on those operations. Although it will take several years to fully develop this cultural competency throughout the operating forces in areas beyond Iraq and Afghanistan, the Career Marine Regional Studies program is the first concrete step the Marine Corps has taken to culturally prepare its operating forces for what lies beyond Iraq and Afghanistan in the Long War.

The program is currently transitioning from its conceptual stage to limited implementation. The program calls for lieutenants attending the Basic Officer Course and sergeants attending the Sergeants Course to choose one of seventeen designated regions which they will then, over the course of their career, study the operational culture and associated language of that region. Distance learning products developed and disseminated by CAOCL facilitate this study. There will be training guidelines and proficiency benchmarks associated with promotions. Officers will begin the study by the



time they are first lieutenants and complete the program by the time they are eligible for promotion to major (a period of approximately seven to nine years). Sergeants will begin their study sometime during their second enlistment and complete it by the time they are eligible for promotion to gunnery sergeant (a period of approximately eight to twelve years).

In summary, the Marine Corps has done much to correct its cultural awareness and language skills training deficiencies during the past couple of years. TECOM has incorporated cultural awareness into the curriculum of several of the Marine Corps' officer PME schools. CAOCL's establishment has helped standardize the pre-deployment culture and language training. The training and education provided by CAOCL and the PME schools is augmented with web-based training also. Marines receive cursory language training, at the very least, prior to deploying to Iraq or Afghanistan. While it is clear the Marine Corps has embraced the importance of cultural awareness in OIF and OEF, it still is unclear if the program they have adopted meets the needs of the operating forces participating in the Long War. Will the Marine Corps forget the importance of cultural competence learned during the last seven years of arduous combat once the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan draw to a close? The next chapter will analyze why, despite its storied history of fighting small and large wars, the Marine Corps failed to institutionalize the importance of cultural awareness in military operations.

## CHAPTER 6

### A FAILURE TO INSTITUTIONALIZE

The Marine Corps has been conducting military operations beyond America's shores for more than two-hundred years, yet only seems to have recently learned that cultural awareness matters in these operations. There are several institutional biases that have prevented the Marine Corps from embracing the role of cultural awareness and elevating it to its rightful position of importance. Some of these biases are specific to the Marine Corps while others are inherent in American society and follow a Marine into the Corps. Until the Marine Corps overcomes these biases, it will not institutionalize the importance of cultural awareness. The result of this ongoing failure will be operating forces that are culturally incompetent to prosecute the Long War beyond Iraq and Afghanistan. This chapter will examine some of the cultural lessons learned by Marines fighting the conflicts of the previous century and some of the reasons that those lessons were not retained by the institution.

#### This Is Not New

For all the recent articles written about the importance of cultural awareness in military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and the Marine Corps' rush to integrate cultural awareness into pre-deployment training, one could mistakenly conclude that cultural awareness has not played a prominent role in previous military operations. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Marine Corps has a long history of conducting operations among people of a foreign culture, just as it is doing today in Iraq and Afghanistan. From the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 to operations in the Philippines

more than a century later, Marines have repeatedly been employed in operations other than war (a term with broad application from humanitarian assistance to counterinsurgency). Marine Corps participation in these operations became so common that it actually published the Small Wars Manual in 1940 to provide a doctrinal approach to missions that fell short of all-out-war. The trend emerged from these operations by the mid-twentieth century that cultural awareness was important when dealing with indigenous populations during these small wars. The fact the Small Wars Manual was published should not be interpreted as evidence of the Marines high level of cultural awareness during their participation in these operations; the manual reflects lessons learned during the previous forty years resulting from positive and negative examples of cultural awareness' impact on military operations.

The “Banana Wars,” a series of U.S. military interventions in Central and South America during the early to mid-1900s, provided the majority of the Marine Corps’ small wars experience. Marine participation in the “Banana Wars” was limited to Haiti, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic. Marines conducted operations in each of these countries in close proximity with populations of a significantly different culture. There is no evidence the Marines conducted any type of formal cultural competency training or possessed any degree of cultural competency prior to commencing any of these campaigns. Not surprisingly, cultural awareness, or lack thereof, was a factor in the outcome of each operation.

The country of Haiti was central to the “Banana Wars”. Between 1857 and 1913, the United States deployed troops there nearly twenty times to protect its American citizens during periods of political violence (House and Wineman, 2007, 101). In 1915, a

provisional brigade of Marines deployed to Haiti to protect American interests following a violent coup and a Marine force remained in Haiti for nearly twenty years. It took the Marines nearly a year to subdue the violent uprisings of the Cacos rebel groups in Haiti (Bickel, 2001, 69). They garrisoned the villages and worked closely with indigenous forces to combat the Cacos who were waging a violent insurgency from the Haitian countryside (Bickel, 2001, 80). In 1918, the Cacos insurgency re-emerged under the leadership of a Haitian named Charlemagne. The Marines waged a two-year campaign that eventually quelled the insurgency. Throughout their occupation of Haiti, the Marines acted in different capacities as a governing force, a civil service, and a security force.

The Marines successfully battled the Cacos insurgency but faltered as an occupation force due to a pervasive cultural incompetence. The Haitian population tolerated the martial law imposed by the Marines but resented the practice of impressing civilians as unpaid laborers which resembled the old social system against which the Haitian people had rebelled. Racism permeated the Marine ranks and influenced the way they viewed and treated the Haitian population (House and Wineman, 2007, 103). The Marines developed a constabulary force from the Haitian population. The Marine leaders offended the Haitian population by choosing enlisted Marines to serve as officers over the constabulary force rather than select and train native Haitians for those positions. Unable to speak the same language as the Haitian people, the Marines were ineffective in training their Haitian counterparts into a capable security force (Bickel, 2007, 82). While the twenty-year occupation of Haiti by U.S. Marines is worthy of mixed reviews for its accomplishments, the occupation force would have undoubtedly experienced less friction and hostility from the Haitian people had it demonstrated a higher level of cultural

competence.

Marines participated in a small war in the Dominican Republic during the same time it was intervening in Haiti. A provisional brigade occupied the country from 1916 to 1922 to stabilize the country and protect American interests after a coup attempt against the U.S. backed president (Bickel, 2001, 109). After driving the rebels from the capital city, the Marines launched an attack on the rebels in the nearby city of Santiago. After defeating the rebel forces, the Marines established a military government. While the Marine occupation was not without its friction points with the native population, the Marines went out of their way to develop personal ties with the native people and gained much respect from them in doing so (Bickel, 2001, 115). However, many of the Marines deployed to the Dominican Republic came from the Marine brigade in Haiti and thus there existed the same cultural incompetence as in Haiti. Racism and public drunkenness further alienated a civilian population that had become tired of its occupying force and its heavy-handed martial law. The results were similar to those in Haiti, with cultural incompetence again being a contributing factor.

The Marine Corps captured many of the lessons learned from its experience in the “Banana Wars” in its *Small Wars Manual*. The ones pertaining to the cultural awareness and the value of language skills were not overlooked in the manual. In fact, there is an entire chapter of the manual, titled “Psychology,” that advocates the criticality of being culturally attuned to the population among whom Marines will operate. Several points of advice in the manual resemble what are today called military cultural factors or considerations, such as: 1) social customs such as class distinctions, dress, and similar items should be recognized and receive due consideration; 2) Political affiliations or the

appearance of political favoritism should be avoided while a thorough knowledge of the political situation is essential; and 3) a respect for religious customs (Small Wars Manual, 1940, 19). Yet, the manual was not in wide circulation in the Marine Corps until it was reprinted in 1990. Even still, the book was not commonly read by Marines until 2003 as the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Force began preparing for its eventual return to Iraq in early 2004.

Contrary to its “Banana Wars” exploits, the Marine Corps’ experience during the Vietnam War provided several examples of military operations positively affected by cultural awareness. The Combined Action Platoon (CAP) program, implemented in 1965 and running through 1971, embedded Marine rifle squads augmented with Navy corpsmen into South Vietnamese villages to provide security against the Viet Cong and develop an indigenous defense force for the village. These Marines lived in the village and interacted with local populace on a daily basis. Before his assignment to a Combined Action Platoon, each Marine completed a two-week course which provided an introduction to the Vietnamese culture, including appreciation for the religions, customs and mannerisms, and an introduction to the Vietnamese language (Wagner, 1968, 44). The cultural awareness gained by this training enabled The CAP Marines were much more effective in their dealings with the Vietnamese civilians because of this cultural competency training. From the earliest stages of the Vietnam War, Marines were assigned to South Vietnamese Army units as military advisors. Beginning in 1962, these advisors attended a six-week Military Assistance Training Advisor Course which focused on the Vietnamese language and culture as well as the duties of military advisors

(Clinton, 2007, 36). These military advisors reaped the same benefits as the CAP Marines from their cultural competency training.

### Relearning the Same Lessons Over and Over

The Marine Corps' experiences during the "Banana Wars" and Vietnam War demonstrate its history of participating in military operations where cultural awareness affects the outcome of the mission. So why has the Marine Corps not institutionalized the importance of cultural awareness in military operations? The answer lies in the culture of the military and the society from which it is drawn. Surely the Marine Corps will institutionalize the importance of cultural awareness in military operations because of its recent experience in Iraq and Afghanistan. This was likely the same sentiment sixty-eight years ago when the Small Wars Manual was first published and yet the Marine Corps launched into OIF and OEF culturally incompetent. The first step to ensuring the Marine Corps gets it right this time is to explore the reasons for its past failures to embrace cultural competency training.

American culture has impeded the realization of the importance of cultural awareness in military operations as it minimizes its importance altogether. The United States has been a world superpower since the end of World War II, a status to which Americans have grown accustomed. As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and the lead nation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United States has wielded incredible influence on the world scene for the better part of the last sixty years. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 and the emergence of the United States as the lone world superpower, many Americans adopted an attitude

that the American perspective is the only correct perspective pertaining to topics of international debate. Such attitudes sometimes manifest themselves as condescension towards foreigners and are not conducive to the development of cultural awareness of foreign populations.

Other aspects of American culture are equally inhibiting. Most Americans speak English as their native language and many are adverse to the idea of having to learn another language. A recent study reveals that only nine percent of Americans are bilingual compared to half of European citizens (AP, 2005, 1), despite the fact that foreign language requirements are still prevalent throughout American high schools and colleges. From a military perspective, the fact that English is one of the two official languages of NATO provides no incentive for U.S. servicemen to learn a European language. When travelling abroad, many Americans prefer to speak English rather than attempting to speak the native language; others still will simply limit their travels to English-speaking destinations, reflected by a recent survey showing five of the top ten international vacation destinations were to English-speaking countries or onboard English-speaking cruise lines while the remaining five Spanish-speaking destinations (Reuters, 2008). The reluctance of many Americans to experience other cultures is reflected in the U.S. military practice of creating a little America within the confines of its overseas base which allows U.S. servicemen to spend an entire tour overseas with minimal exposure to the host nation culture and population.

While the American culture's impact is significant, it is the military culture that has served as an impediment to embracing cultural awareness in military operations. An institutional bias exists against operations other than war. The well-known military



historian Basil Liddell Hart once observed, ‘the only thing harder than getting a new idea into the military mind is to get an old one out’ (Kiszely, 2007, 10). The end of the Cold War shattered the half-century old American paradigm of war. Through this paradigm, the battlefield for which military professionals prepared (and by which they judged their professionalism) was the arena of large-scale combat between two regular armed forces dominated by firepower and maneuver. Unable to ignore the repeated need for military forces in other places for purposes other than full-blown conventional combat, professional soldiers viewed these operations other than war as distractions from the ‘real thing’ (Kiszely, 2007, 6). Though the end of Cold War eliminated the foe for which generations of military professionals had trained to defeat, the smashing success of the Persian Gulf War in 1991 seemed to validate the American ‘one size fits all’ approach to warfighting.

The U.S. military’s fixation on large-scale conventional combat has resulted in the indirect discouragement of career assignments that would develop foreign cultural awareness in the officer corps. The perception exists that officers who pursue such career tracks as the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) and Regional Area Officer (RAO) Program or military attaché duty are less competitive for promotion than those who have remained within traditional combat arms assignments. In fact, the most recent round of officer promotion boards was the first to include the Commandant’s guidance that FAO and RAO assignments should be given equal value as assignments within an officer’s primary specialty (Abbott, 2008). Many view participation in an advanced degree program or the Olmsted Scholar program as an attempt by an officer to build his résumé for a post-military career, thereby rendering them career killers within the military. Furthermore,

cultural awareness is often confused with sensitivity training and does not gain a lot of traction in a military dominated by aggressive 'type-A' personalities.

So there have been many obstacles over the years to the Marine Corps institutionalizing the importance of cultural competency. Some of these obstacles remain, but fortunately several have been dismissed in recent years as a result of the Marine Corps' OIF and OEF experiences. The current rhetoric from the Commandant, reinforced by the establishment of CAOCL and introduction of cultural competency training into the PME system, suggest that the Marine Corps may have overcome its institutional biases. Whether or not the Marine Corps has finally institutionalized the importance of cultural competency likely will not be known until after it concludes its operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and moves on to the future battlefields of the Long War.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The central theme of this thesis has been that the Marine Corps must institutionalize the importance of cultural awareness in military operations and implement a comprehensive training program to develop culturally competent Marines. The assertion was made, and evidence provided, that the Marine Corps had done little to produce cultural competency in its operating forces prior to the start of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom in 2001 and 2003, respectively. However, much has changed during the past few years in the manner that the Marine Corps prepares its operating forces to participate in the Long War. One of the most significant changes has been the focus on cultural awareness throughout several different components of the Marine Corps training and education system. Several conclusions drawn from the research conducted on this subject follow. Furthermore, some recommendations are offered on how to fully realize the goal of institutionalizing the importance of cultural awareness and producing an operating force that is culturally competent to participate in the Long War.

#### Conclusions

The Marine Corps has made great strides towards the goal of developing culturally competent Marines to participate in the Long War. The establishment of the Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning represents the Marine Corps' single greatest achievement thus far in its quest to produce culturally competent Marines. As the leading advocate for cultural competency training, the center has developed and

implemented a robust pre-deployment training regimen for units going to Iraq and Afghanistan. The center's work with the Marine Corps Training Command has clearly resulted in a higher level of cultural competency in the operating forces participating in OIF and OEF. Furthermore, the establishment of the center is critical in order for the Marine Corps to institutionalize the key relationship between cultural competency and military operations.

While CAOCL has achieved much progress in the pre-deployment training of OIF and OEF units, marginal progress has been made introducing cultural awareness training into the curriculum of the professional military education schools. The progress that has been made exists within the officer education system. However, the instruction is coming too late in the officer career path to affect most officers when they need it the most, at the company-grade level. Enlisted Marines attending their required professional military education schools are not receiving adequate cultural awareness training and no language training. Thus, the importance of the cultural awareness training provided by CAOCL during the pre-deployment training phase is not being reinforced in the enlisted classrooms of the Marine Corps Education Command's formal schools.

The current initiatives by the Marine Corps to increase cultural competency in its operating forces fall short in addressing the short and long term requirements of the Long War. While the Career Regional Studies Program represents a long term approach to developing cultural competency among Marine Officers and SNCOs, it fails to address the cultural competency of the nearly 52,000 sergeants and SNCOs and 19,000 officers on active duty. It will take ten years before junior officers enrolled in the Career Regional Studies Program reach the field-grade ranks where they are likely to fill planner

billets on appropriate level staffs. Meanwhile, Marines are only developing cultural competency for the Iraq and Afghanistan theaters of operation through the CAOCL-sponsored pre-deployment training. The Marine Corps must prepare to operate in other regions. As the eventual drawdown of Marine forces in those two countries occurs, officers and SNCOs who missed the enrollment into the Career Regional Studies Program will not be required to further their cultural competency aside from the required cursory pre-deployment training currently conducted. The likelihood of the successful employment of the Security Cooperation MAGTF after OIF and OEF will be enhanced by a greater depth of cultural awareness than that offered by short-term pre-deployment training.

#### Recommendations

- Continue the CAOCL-sponsored pre-deployment training regimen for units deploying to OIF and OEF as currently administered.
- Incorporate cultural awareness training into the curriculum of the enlisted PME schools, from the Corporals Course to through the Career Course. This can be done while only adding about an hour of instruction to the current POI. The Corporals', Sergeants', and Staff Sergeants' courses require the students to teach a short class to their classmates on a subject of their choosing in order to demonstrate proficiency in Techniques of Military Instruction. The school could dictate that the subject be the role of cultural competence on a particular military operation; the student can choose the operation. All that would be required is a short refresher class on operational culture that should last no more than one hour.
- Expand the Career Regional Studies Program to include all officers and SNCOs

currently serving on active duty. Adjustments will need to be made to the current cultural awareness curriculum in the officer PME schools to avoid unnecessary duplication. Specifically, the language training at CSC could likely be eliminated. The progression requirements for this current group of officers and SNCOs would be similar to those of new lieutenants and sergeants being enrolled (i.e. approximately seven to twelve years for completion and benchmarks associated with promotion eligibility). Additional funds will need to be budgeted to support the distance learning materials for the additional participants.

- Offer college credits to enlisted Marines for completing the various portions of the Career Regional Studies Program. Specifics of the implementation of this recommendation require more research and would likely be coordinated thorough the Marine Corps College of Continuing Education, part of TECOM.
- Publish All Marine Message (ALMAR) from the Commandant of the Marine Corps highlighting the significance of cultural competency in the military operations and emphasizing the importance of the Career Regional Studies Program. This action requires no resources other than the effort of drafting and staffing a message for approval before release by the Commandant.
- Institutionalize the importance of lessons learned by incorporating into the curriculum of each enlisted and officer PME school a short brief explaining access procedures to and organization of the MCCLL database. This brief could be as short as fifteen minutes and does not mandate an extension of the course.

The Marine Corps can take the next important step toward the goal of institutionalizing the importance of cultural awareness in military operations and producing an operating force that is culturally competent to participate in the Long War. Cultural competency alone does not ensure the Marine Corps' success on the future battlefields of the Long War. However, experience has shown thus far that a culturally incompetent force is much more likely to squander opportunities to bring a hostile or neutral people to its side and less likely to accomplish its mission without unnecessary hardship and friction.

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